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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The influence of the Mystery-religions upon primitive Christianity has recently been treated in a monograph by Clemen¹ and a volume by Kennedy.² Clemen's brochure serves as a supplement to his *Religionsgeschichtliche Erklärung des Neuen Testaments*, where this subject was scarcely noticed. The same painstaking scholarship which characterized the latter work is to be seen on every page of the present pamphlet. By way of introduction, the status of the Mystery-religions in the New Testament writers' world is set forth in meager outlines, with the conclusion that these movements were not generally effective in that period. No trace of their influence upon the early Palestinian Christian community is discovered. In Paul's case the possibility of a slight influence is admitted for such terms as *χρίειν*, *σφραγίζεσθαι*, *πίστις*, *ὑπακοή*, *άγιος*, "father" and "child" for teacher and pupil, and less probably *ἀδελφός*, *στύματα*, and *σωτήρ*. So much for *terminology*. But in the realm of *ideas* Paul is entirely independent. He never thinks of baptism or of the Lord's Supper sacramentally, baptism for the dead being the only seeming exception (I Cor. 15:29). But Paul is held not to have been the author of this custom and not to have given it his approval. Those writers who make Paul indebted to the Mysteries are criticized (1) for importing into the latter ideas and practices which were not there at this date and (2) for unwarrantedly ascribing sacramentalism to Paul. Of the other New Testament writings, Mark and Matthew are found to be wholly free from this foreign influence. Acts' account of the conversion of Cornelius and of Paul may have been colored by similar stories in the Mysteries, but this conclusion is not compulsory. In the remaining New Testament books there are no sure evidences of similar obligations. The real influence of the Mystery-religions upon Christianity is placed in the second century, and first appears in Gnosticism.

Kennedy finds the Mysteries to have been more widely spread and more generally influential in New Testament times. In fact, they

¹ *Der Einfluss der Mysterienreligionen auf das älteste Christentum*. Von Carl Clemen. Giessen: Töpelmann, 1913. 88 pages. M. 3.40.

² *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*. By H. A. A. Kennedy. London, New York, and Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1913. xviii+311 pages. 6s.

have already affected Judaism, particularly in the Diaspora, in the pre-Christian period. Next, their general character is described by taking as representative the Eleusinia, the cults of Cybele-Attis and of Isis-Serapis, and the Hermetic literature. Mithraism is ignored because assumed to have exerted no influence in Paul's world. The omission of the cults of Ishtar-Tammuz, Atargatis-Hadad, and Aphrodite-Adonis, which are associated closely with Syria and Cilicia, may not be serious, but one naturally thinks of this territory first in connection with much of Paul's life both before and after his conversion to Christianity. Yet the description of the Mysteries on the basis of the illustrations chosen shows how generally the Mystery conception of religion pervaded the life of that age. A fuller use of the available data would only have increased the intensity of this conviction. On turning to a consideration of Paul in relation to this world, we are told that he was practically uninfluenced by these religious surroundings. A detailed comparison of his *terminology* with that of the Mysteries results, our author thinks, in showing that it is "wholly superfluous" to seek from this source the explanation of Pauline usage. A similar study of Paul's *ideas* yields a like result, for only in the imagery and not in the essence is kinship to the Mysteries to be admitted. Likewise baptism and the Lord's Supper have a purely ethical and symbolical significance for Paul and are never sacramental, in the sense in which that term is used of the Mystery-religions.

Both of these authors have given us scholarly and valuable discussions of this very interesting subject. They employ quite similar methods and arrive at essentially the same conclusions. The method in each case is that of refutation rather than constructive investigation. Not that they fail to be constructive, but the whole trend of their discussion seems to be determined by a selection of opinions from other writers whom they wish to refute. This gives a reader the impression that it would have been quite unnecessary to treat this subject if its claims to attention had not been unduly pressed by writers like Reitzenstein. But the fundamental problem of the full extent and influence of the Mystery-religions in the first century and a genetic study of the early Christians' real vital contact with this situation do not seem to appeal to either of these authors as questions which need to be taken very seriously. In this they appear to have defined their task too narrowly, and so to have lessened the value of their work.

SHIRLEY JACKSON CASE

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO